00050853

Digitized with financial assistance from

HT Parekh FOUNDATION

An Initiative by HDFC WITH YOU, RIGHT THROUGH

on 15 October, 2018

The Purdahnashin

BY

CORNELIA SORABJI

4651.

50853

A.C.

With a Foreword by the Countess of Minto

9X-7-81

CALCUTTA
THACKER, SPINK & CO
1917

ORI
396
Sor/Pur
50853

PRINTED BY
THACKER, SPINK AND CO
CALCUTTA

Dedicated

To

HER EXCELLENCY

Lady Chelmsford

At whose suggestion this

little Monograph was

put together

By the same Author

SUN BABIES.

JOHN MURRAY.

BEHIND THE TWILIGHTS.

HARPER AND BROTHERS.

INDIAN TALES OF THE GREAT ONES.

BLACKIE & SONS, LD.

CONTENTS.

	Page.
Foreword by the Countess of Minto	vii
Preface	xi
PART I.—Back to the Woman ..	1
PART II.—Practical Suggestions	35
PART III.—Appendix ..	61
A. Doctors, Nurses, and Medical Matters	62
B. A Note on the Education of Orthodox Purdahnashins	73

FOREWORD.

"Give me strength to make my love fruitful in service."—TAGORE.

THOSE like myself who have been privileged on rare occasions to pass over the threshold of the Purdah-nashin zenana will welcome the opportunity of obtaining the further glimpse behind the veil which the following pages afford.

It is fortunate that the writer, who for twenty-three years has frequented zenanas as friend and adviser, should be willing to impart her valuable knowledge in order that others may profit by her experience. However intelligent a

woman may be, she cannot without special training understand how to approach Purdahnashins. This needs careful study of the thoughts and customs of the orthodox among Indian people.

The war has brought about a new era, and it seems an appropriate moment to urge the study of things relating to women. There should be a special schedule for zenana and house-to-house teachers, for without it how can they be expected to avoid trampling, through ignorance, on cherished traditions. The tender plant that is gradually putting forth tendrils must not be rudely handled. It must be many years before the cult and science of the zenana will be ready to emancipate itself outside its own world. Any attempt to precipitate matters would only tend

to make the Purdahnashins desirous of adhering more tenaciously to their customs, and to wrap their orthodoxy more closely round them. Until these orthodox masses are gently guided towards the goal of knowledge, until the homes from which the boys come are different, and until the mothers are enlightened, the English-speaking India cannot reap the full benefit of their advanced schemes for higher education.

Our immediate task is to provide instruction for those who wish to influence for good the home behind the Purdah. With sympathy and discretion we must learn how to obtain an entrance into that home, so that by patience and tactful understanding we may teach its inmates to welcome a wider outlook

into a world which has hitherto been a sealed book to them. As Miss Sorabji's Rani says with such beautiful simplicity, "There is no caste in love," and this surely should be our watchword for our intercourse with the zenana.

MARY MINTO.

PREFACE.

THIS little offering is brought in the name of the Purdahnashin, in the love and service of whom were learnt the things here collected.

As much as the most strenuous war-worker has she cared, and perhaps with more poignancy of emotion than any of us, has she prayed for the sorrows and needs of war-time, and for the victory of our King-Emperor in the great struggle.

The war found her a child in knowledge. For English and German she had but one name.

"Why," she puzzled, "are the *Ingrez* now so kind, now so cruel?"

Then, when explanations were made, it took some time for her to grasp the fact that "Cousin-Brothers" fighting, could be so different each from each.

Her reflections have been most interesting. Utter contempt for breach of hospitality (that the Kaiser was planning treachery while the guest of our King-Emperor has moved her greatly): contempt, too, for the fact that intrigue passes, with the Hun, into brutality and cruelty. For intrigue she has the admiration of a woman for a man-child who has over-reached her; she would call it, in the dramatic language of the East, "ripe," full-grown, a sign of intellect and a title to the mastery.

But cruelty has in her eyes robbed the enemy of credit for even cleverness itself.

She has now a simple explanation of the entire situation. Germans are *rakshas*, or demons, sent into the world to hasten our expiation for the sins of past lives. And, having arrived at this conclusion, she is curiously content to see the struggle through, never doubting the end, or to whom will be the victory.

Another significant fact is her measuring rod. The Hindu Book of the Great Ones is constantly now in her mind.

She makes the enemy stand beside the heroes of her race and religion. The wars of the Pandavas are the only wars of which she now seems

to have knowledge. Never have I heard any reference to a time when English and Indian might have been opposed.

Since the German Kaiser began to fight his "Cousin-Brother," that Cousin-Brother has her loyalty the more whole-heartedly.

Indeed she talks of our Maharajah now as the common property of the Empire: and of British fighting men as of direct descent from the five great Pandava Brothers.

The enemy has not of course neglected the Purdahnashin in his propaganda; but the way in which one at least of his stories has been received must have been a surprise to the Hun. In 1915 a rumour made its way into the zenanas of

Bengal, Behar and Orissa, that London had been seized by the Germans, and that the King-Emperor driven forth was a refugee, in hiding in India.

All that the women felt was a passion of loyalty and devotion that it was *to India* that the King had cared to come. "That the Maharajah should care to shelter *with us*, the wonder of it," made the women glow with gratitude and pride. It was as if they were saying in their hearts, "We knew that we belonged: here is proof. The Maharajah has come to his own home in Hindustan."

Characteristic again is her response on hearing specific tales of the cruelty of the enemy to women and children.

She identifies herself so completely with those who suffer, that as you talk to her you know that like Mediæval Saints over their religious meditations, she is feeling in her own person that of which she hears.

. . . . . .

And thus, in her quiet life, untouched by the world's great struggle, unhelped by all the aids to realization with which news and knowledge and books and picture papers supply the rest of us—she gives to our cause the ministry of prayer and *puja* and sacrifice—fasting while she prays, as is her wont when she would make a worthwhile purchase of her Gods.

The wonder of her constancy, and of the absence of desire or claim for recognition, has often touched me

For surely like all women she must want *to be busy*, to be doing something visible with hands or head, in the world of women.

As much as she can, she does—she sews garments or knits . . . . . and of her substance she gives generously; but like her prayers, in secret, behind closed doors: even her money contributions not labelled in her name, but merged in the total written to the credit of District or Province.

And so—I bring this little book with my Purdahnashin written all over it, that without breach of the customs of her race, she may have her share in Flag Day. And the only thing which I will hide in my heart is the name of her, and her, and her, and her . . . . . to whom

I owe the personal gifts of interpretation or revelation, which I have tried in this short Monograph to share with others.

C. S.

CALCUTTA,
November, 1917.

PART I.

BACK TO THE WOMAN.

(1) An old Latin lawyer has remarked that woman is both the beginning and the end of the human family.

In India we are in need of remembering that she may be both the beginning and the end of Progress.

Manu knew something about this: but, manlike, for "Progress" he used the word "Comfort." And all his tender and cautious sayings about women seem to have at the back of them this domestic realization . . . . .

"When the women of a house are satisfied and happy, the Gods are pleased."

The architect of the early Indian house knew that too, and built a "sulking chamber" into each zenana, whither the

woman might retire and sulk, refusing companionship and the culinary duty she owed to her lord, until she was given that for which she went on strike.

In an orthodox and ancient world where caste was still observed by husband and brother, the Indian woman had thus a powerful weapon—an objective species of "hunger-strike."

But Manu, after recommending strict attention to the chiffon and sugar plums which are to keep the women of a house in good humour, goes on to emphasize the fact that when she has served man's comfort her uses are exhausted. She is not to be given independence outside that sulking-room.

In her youth she is in the tutelage of her father, later of her husband, her parents-in-law, or her son. Women are never to be considered as "in their own power."

And, summing up his threat to the man who will not pay his debts, he has one last fling at woman, showing very clearly the

place she filled in the warrant of procedure of that greatest of Indian lawyers.

" Beware," he says, " he who does not pay his debts is born again, as a slave, a servant, a quadruped, or *a woman.*"

And in spite of it all, 1,900 years after Manu, the Indian woman has her revenge.

For what thinking man or woman of us, looking at India, and particularly at the Provinces of Bengal, can refrain from realizing the truth of the statement with which I prefaced this paper:—

" Woman is both the beginning and the end of Progress."

(2) *She is the end of Progress.*—Whether the nineteenth century architect builds her her sulking chamber or no, still does she coerce the man of her household—doggedly, inexorably.

He may " cross the black waters," and discard his religion, or his superstitions, or his national dress; he may furnish what is called " the Outside " from Whiteaway

or Lazarus; he may provision his table from Wallace's or Peliti's—when he steps into the woman's domain, he stands on the threshold of the second century.

Indeed, we must all have known the woman wrap her garment of the ages, the closer about her, just because of this thing which "the Progressives"—men and women—call "Progress."

She is then, to the man, the end. In her zenana is his boundary wall.

But my own feeling is that he must ever be within that boundary wall and shut out from the breeze-swept moors of true progress, unless he can take her with him on his Great Adventure.

In a very real sense would she then be the beginning of Progress.

(3) I propose now to consider the woman as she is in the orthodox Hindu zenanas of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and Assam.

How does she stand towards Life in its various aspects?

And how can we best meet her needs?

What is the zenana attitude for instance towards health, towards domestic sanitation, towards the care of children, towards education?

The answer is simple. There is no knowledge at all in the zenana of these subjects, *as such.*

If personal or domestic sanitation gets an innings, it is in the name of Religion.

The daily bath is a religious necessity.

But there was no one to preach the gospel of clean and pure water.

The ancients did their best. They proclaimed the largest of rivers sacred, in the attempt, no doubt, to secure a good water-supply. Their descendants translated the investiture into a sanctity which even the worst of defilements left immune. And you and I, wandering up and down the Ganges, wonder that man can bathe and drink, and be alive.

It is not easy to fix the time when the habit came in of washing the *sari* on the

person. We who live in Bengal know how a woman will go clothed into her river-bath and come out believing that she has washed sufficiently both her skin and her draperies. I have seen the same in Benares.

Early pictures and descriptions of the bath, found in literature, do not justify the habit. I have my suspicions that when towns made public the reed-protected bathing-ghats, this was the poor Purdahnashin's insanitary self-defence.

Again, food is a purely religious cult: and on the whole the religious restrictions about food and fasts seem to act with extraordinary benefit to longevity. The widow who eats one meal a day, and fasts absolutely, not even touching water at *Ekadashi* (the bi-monthly fast), is dieted to suit her lethargic life.

In sickness, generally speaking, nothing is eaten for fear of offering hospitality to the demon who is at the moment inhabiting the human body. Within limits, that

too is a good rule, since the zenana has no knowledge of relative food values.

But when one has admitted that much one has gone as far as possible.

The woman has not the remotest idea how to take care of herself in any situation.

Illness, as I have said, is regarded as "possession" by some particular evil spirit, to be driven forth by Pujas; or if the patient be a much loved child—by neglect.

"The Gods are jealous, or the demons are paying a visit . . . . . What else?"

I have known children burning with fever thrown on to an unsavoury mattress in a remote corner of the house, or on the edge of a cesspool, given neither water nor medicine, and no care whatever.

"Don't take notice, and the demon will depart: pretend not to care, the Gods will be deceived," says the poor mother, moist-eyed.

I have known a case of small-pox where, the patient being a beloved only son, his widowed mother could not bring herself to try neglect; but she said she had done everything commanded in the *Shastras*—she had dressed all the women in red *saris*, and had dieted every one but the patient!

In another zenana black small-pox was not recognized as such "A luckless thing has happened to us," the women told me. "The demon who visits us in this sickness either takes us away with her, or leaves holes in our faces when she goes." . . . . . A small child at the peeling stage was being carried about the courtyard of the zenana.

Again, in an enteric case, I have known them put the patient on the floor, while a priest and his disciple strove to rouse her to consciousness in order that she might call on Kali.

Her temperature was 105°. They snapped their fingers at all the pulses of

her body, and rang bells and burnt melted butter, while the relations and waiting women crowded round prostrate in loud petition to Kali.

The patient's diet was nuts and green mangoes.

In a cholera case, the patient was carried into a temple, still in process of construction, and the priest fed her on green mangoes. She lay on a mat in a little damp unfloored room. It would some day be occupied by a priest. It was therefore holy. She *must* recover, they said. It is needless to add that the woman died in a few hours.

In many cases I have known suggestion used with appalling success . . . *e.g.*, to a pneumonia patient—

"If you sleep in a bed, you will die," and she is lifted on to the stone floor.

When she died, it was fate, they said, which killed her nevertheless.

Or again, to a widow—"On the third day after the completion of the death

ceremonies you will lie down and die," —she longed for death, poor woman— "if first you have given all your wealth to a priest." The wealth was duly bestowed, and it was only a chance visit which prevented the other part of the programme . . . .

Too often help comes too late, as must needs be the case with what I shall call "attempts to expedite regeneration"— poisoned food, poisoned garments. . .

Against crime one is helpless, since post-mortems and deterrent measures would be hateful to the zenana.

But to the wrongs wrought in love and ignorance, one can, thank God, bring remedy. And I am full of hope for a future of enlightenment and care in the cases, for instance, of the gift of life to some poor little child-mother.

Let us piece together what the Hindu mother knows about her baby :—

There must be such and such ceremonies : a girl for 30 days, a boy-baby

for 21 days are untouchable and all the little clothes worn during this period are burnt or destroyed. The mother herself has not been able to make these clothes in preparation for what the Japanese call "the honourable guest of the mother-heart." It would be presuming, taking the child too much for granted. When the baby is six months old if a boy, seven months if a girl, it is entitled to a name, and to "take rice," *i.e.*, it is now an individual and, in measure, a Hindu.

But (in parts of these Provinces) each time its father goes *shikaring* during the first year of its life, the baby's head must be shaved*—I have never been able to discover why—and there is no more important bit of year-old lore than this. If you wish your child to know the earth and bird and beast, and flower-secrets, do not forget

* Since writing the above, I have thought of a reason. The shorn head is a sign of mourning. When his father goes a-hunting is the baby perhaps chief mourner for his friends of the forest?

to dress it for one short day in a garment of leaves, pinned together with thorns!

As to food—why, you give it what it wants. Whenever it cries, give it food, for what else should it cry?

As it grows older it is given the hot and highly-spiced food eaten by its elders—and quantities of sweetmeats, of a sweetness cloying to the unaccustomed.

They know nothing about the need of care for teeth or eyes, about the danger of dust to cut limbs.

In illness the great rule seems to be "do not bathe the child": "give it no air." Its head will be tied up in woolies of every kind, and doors and windows will be barricaded, whatever the temperature.

We all know about the anointings with oil; and how, when zenana methods induce sores and eczema of every description, the poor little body is tormented with flies.

To me the marvel is that so many babies manage to grow into men and women.

As little do the mothers know of the necessity for care or discipline as to sleep. The child will be put to sleep on a large *takhtposh* shared by four generations from grandmother to eldest daughter; and "When we feel lonely, we can wake the child and play with it," they have told me in support of this arrangement.

Since these, then, are the "sorrowful chances" of what awaits a child in the simple business of living from day to day, it will readily be guessed that one can scarcely bear to talk about the measures taken against accident or disease.

As I have indicated, the prevailing idea is that illness is a possession of the Evil One, and that accident is the manifestation of ill-will of God or demon—the result of some tempting of the adverse, some presumption on the part of a mortal. Sometimes a magic man or medicine

woman will be called in—almost invariably a priest. If a doctor is summoned, it is some ancient Kaviraj.

I have known one such prescribe, for a patient mentally deranged, that her chin should be stroked by a Chumar (a man of the cobbler caste) at midnight with a red hibiscus flower. I have known another deliberately make gangrenous what needed the surgeon's knife, "It will then drop off by itself," he explained.

I am talking, it will be remembered, of the zenanas remote from towns, and where there are no men relations, or only such as are entirely ruled by their women.

(4) But let us turn now to my second consideration. How are we to meet this state of things in a strange house? Bring in a lady doctor? They would not hear of it. "She would send another kind of devil into us," they will say.

Even where my strictly orthodox Hindu friends have let me take them a doctor, she is not at first allowed to look

at their tongue. She must stand outside the threshold. I must look and report. To get them to show a tongue at all is a lengthy process, involving much explanation. "Heu! what's the good of that?" I have been told, "the pain is so very much lower down!"

What is one to do?

As you will realize, everything depends on just how one approaches the moment's trouble. The method which I have found most successful is to proceed from the known to the unknown—to take accepted beliefs and superstitions so far as principle does not forbid, and turn them to some purpose.

I will explain what I mean:—

"To light a fire on the top of the mother of a newly-born infant" was, I found, a common remedy for collapse. How was one to get past that? Talking would not help. "We always do it. If it is her fate to live, she lives; if not—who can fight against the Gods?"

Some other way must be found.

One considered . . . It was *warmth* they wanted really, not *fire* . . . . . an oblation to heat . . . . . and there was water, their most sacred element. Why not *Gunga Jal*? It was worth trying.... And so one suggested it. There were the great pots of Ganges water, filled every morning, standing near the *Puja Ghar* (the house of worship). "Let us heat some Ganges water and so you shall have a better oblation still. And the fire, let us burn in that incense-pan by the window." . . . .

And it was allowed—the practice of generations yielded in a moment, the most superstitious of the aunts and grandmothers on the side of the hot-water bottle *because* it would be filled with Ganges water.

Or, take another instance—that Raj far from the Railway of which I have told you, the family down with black small-pox. It was incredible that they should not know about "Kali" or

"Devi" as they call this too frequent disease, yet they were entirely ignorant, talking of the demon who made holes in their faces; and one must do something to reach them *at the place where they stood* . . . . . To insist on vaccination, as to persuade to it, as such, was equally impossible. One just would not have been understood. But there was their superstition, the visit of something not-human, the need for propitiation. Could one make use of that idea?

One might try: and so:—

"You-people call this sickness Kali," one said for a beginning—"the visit of *Kali*. It is a common sickness."

"Yes, yes"—began the oldest *Ji* with reminiscences.

"And, oh! then," said the women, instantly, "the propitiation—Kali must have blood."

"Well! this time," I said, "only a very little blood. Should I show them how?

just a prick." . . . . . And so the way was clear.

Of course it was not quite so easy as that, because they had to be convinced that the time was propitious, etc. etc. . .

But two days saw us through, just long enough to get our vaccinator from the nearest British town.

As a general rule then, *to adopt their language* is the quickest way.

It is no use trying to convince that there is no demon. That can be left for later effort, when love and confidence have paved the way. For now, "I have an antidote" will at least gain your quinine pills, or what not, a trial.

And here one ventures to urge what all visitors to orthodox Hindu zenanas soon find out for themselves.

Liquid medicines cannot be taken by the strictly orthodox from the hand, or at the instance of a non-Hindu. Pills or powders may be taken.

But the non-Hindu must stand outside the threshold of the patient's room, when she takes her draught of water with the pill. This is *most* important. To do otherwise is to outcaste your patient; and she would far rather be left to die.

If then one formulates another rule it is this—observe strictly whatever etiquette the zenana desires. Find out about it *somehow*, and however superstitious or silly or senseless you may think it—cleave to it.

Your reward soon comes in leave to discard it.

For there lies the wonder of wonders in these houses of the Hindu-tie which binds so rigidly.

The strictest bonds are loosed by love; and no one but the woman can loose the bonds of Religion.

So many stories one could tell in illustration of that beautiful fact.

One tale must suffice.

It is the story of an English nurse put into a zenana to save the life of a precious baby heir to a Raj.

The poor little Purdahnashin did not like it at first, and it was not an easy time for nurse or mother or me.

Whenever the baby came up into the zenana, it was washed in Ganges water before the mother would touch it. Of course one pretended not to notice: that would surely change. And it did.

There came a day when all the barriers were down. Baby was taken straight from the nurse. "You saw it, Miss Sahib, you saw it," said Rani Ma.

"What did I see?"

"No need now for purification," said Rani Ma. "Nurse Mem loves our baby. *There is no caste in love.*"

I know you will feel with me that we want no better watchword for our intercourse with the zenana.

"*There is no caste in love.*"

So then, if you wish reform in India about matters of health and sanitation, if you wish the improvement of the race and the decrease of infant mortality, back you must go to the woman and begin there your work of reform.

(5) And as to the things of the Spirit ?

I am not competent to speak ; but, so far as I can judge, I should advise the same method—sweeping into the channels which seem to us the better, the only channels, all that the little women have to give, all their devotion and self-sacrifice, all the beauty of their best impulses. So much there is that is admirable—thoughts that are akin to the mysticism of Christian saints, selflessness that transcends experience . . . . a casting away of all symbols, and a reaching-forth which leaves one breathless when admitted for a moment to some beautiful parable of the Eternal, in the twilight talk of her who can neither read nor write, and whom the Progressive Hindu would call grossly ignorant.

I recall the blessing of an old Hindu Purdahnashin friend, who was wont, when I left her house on my evening visits, to come from her House of Gods to speed me on my way. "Come again" was her good-bye "and may the shadow of the thought of God which is in my heart fall upon you and give you peace." What could be more beautiful?

But—one sad thing I have discovered. All this wonder of mysticism is without foundation. It is based on personal, human perfection. In times of trouble it falls away; and the poor saint is in an agony, lying prone before Kali, flying from one shrine to another.

"Oh, why not your usual meditations?" I asked once, "The House of Prayer which holds no images?"

"No, no: that is not for times of trouble," was the answer, "the lesser Gods must be propitiated."

Yet—when once that truth is grasped by the teacher, is not the door open at a

place where the highest help can enter?

Or, take again that beautiful practice of putting away all idols, and shutting all *Puja Ghars* after the birth of a child. "God has given us this great gift—a child. He will not be angry, if we pray without images" . . . one dear old woman explained to me. Is there not *there* the beginning of the end of all teaching? More than half the ground covered? But their very own doctrine after all, to be made perpetual.

"God has given us this great gift of a Child. We may go to Him in the name of a Child. He will refuse nothing. . . He will not be angry."

(6) *Woman the beginning and the end.*—The guardian of the health and religion of her home, the only true guardian of *education*. For we must get hold of that fact by the roots.

What chance is there for boys homed in a zenana, where the meaning of the word discipline is unknown? Boys,

whose poor little mothers have no knowledge of what is doing in the great world, of what ambitions to hold in their hearts for their children, of what temptations against which to pray, of what measuring-rod to put into their hands for the great trackless spaces outside their own four walls.

Think but a moment. Is it any wonder that, in Bengal, the names of our boys are so often written beneath headlines which make our hearts sad and ashamed? What use to multiply hostels and boys' schools, while the orthodox Hindu mother is left where she is, and while the boy must return to the zenana from whatever school control?

"*Back to the woman*" for this too.

It is there we must begin—not, I think, by opening zenana doors, and doing away with the custom of the Purdah; but by educating there, behind those closed doors, patiently, gently, moving inch by inch, keeping firmly all that is beautiful,

being equally firm about all that is wrong and which does not belong to orthodox Hinduism in its purest original sense.

Sympathy alone will not do. Knowledge is needed—patient study, and an understanding heart, and a level head; and *unafraidness*. I would put that last almost first—next to Love. It is indeed a consequence of the Love which has cast out fear.

The man or woman with a little knowledge is always in danger of helping to strengthen the wrong things under the name of sympathy.

Take one example.

The marriage of young boys is encouraged on the assumption that this is required by Hinduism. In Bengal, too often boys are fathers at 16 and 17 years of age.

As a matter of fact there was a very clearly defined programme for the education and upbringing of boys of the three highest castes under ancient Hinduism.

As a child, a boy was allowed a certain license. His lapses from strict orthodoxy could not really outcaste him. But at the age of 9 or 10 they said—"You are now old enough to be a Hindu," and he was initiated into Hinduism by the ceremony which gave him the caste-symbol of his religion—the finely woven nine-stranded sacred thread,* which to this day the higher caste Hindu wears round his neck.

The ceremony itself, as I have seen it performed, is rather beautiful. The incantations having been said, and the rules of the ceremonial observance of Hinduism having been mastered, the boy is dressed in Azalea-coloured pilgrim robes, and goes from guest to guest with a beggar's bowl in his hand and a branch of the sacred *Bael* tree carried as a staff across his shoulders.

The meaning of this in ancient days was that he went as an ascetic into the years devoted to education; he went to

---

* *Note.*—The sacred thread should be woven of cotton, the Kush grass, and a black deer's skin.

school as a renouncer of the world and a restrainer of his appetites; and, till he returned home from this religious school at an age varying from 20 to 24, he did really live as an ascetic and scholar under the strictest discipline.

He could not marry during the time that he was at school; and he lived by a religious rule in all things.

In modern days the Thread Ceremony is still performed, but the boy is excused the period of discipline and the practice of religion. I will not attempt to say whose fault this is. But if the educationalist or person in authority who gives in to the appeal for the growing boy to be kept in the zenana, or for the relaxation of even day-school discipline, or to the request for early marriage knew the facts above stated about the rules of ancient Hinduism, it would most certainly make a difference to the homes that he controls.

I have experience of this. To answer a Hindu mother with knowledge of correct

Hindu doctrine, or of ancient custom, has a very real chance of success.

Let us get the women on our side then, they are the true guardians of Hindu tradition, and it is well to know every instance in which such tradition can be a help. For we shall need the women on our side in situations also in which there is no tradition to guide us, in situations where habits of mind and tradition and ideals must all be re-made to meet the necessities of people who are in the words of an oriental proverb " Walking with one foot." What are we to do when this happens ? What are we to do with the foot that lags behind ? Is it not that foot which should claim our attention ?

But how should we begin ?

So much work there is here to be done.

Method can be left to later discussion, let us first get some idea of the work that is before us. What should be done in the zenana, for instance, to help the new outlook on public life, that which we are told

is the awakening of a nation's consciousness ?

Tradition cannot help here.

You have the bustling practical West up against the brooding contemplative East. If all India is to share in the ambitions to which a few educated Indians give expression, you must teach your Purdanashin to desire this Western ideal with its push and its competition, and its putting of values on *what a man gives himself* (what he makes of his life, how he gets to himself possessions, what he does for his fellow-men—all this), in room of the Eastern ideal which puts value on one thing alone, *that which his birth* (caste, the fruit of past incarnations) *has given to a man* in the Eastern standard of his aloofness from his fellowmen.

Is not that really the basic difference ?

What a man gives himself.

What the fruit of past incarnations gives him.

A man among his fellows, responsible for them, owing them duties, forbearances, sacrifices, service.

A man aloof, not responsible for others, and unable indeed to affect them in fundamental matters, inasmuch as the fruit of past lives (*Karma*) has settled all that.

How are you to educate the Purdahnashin, sitting there behind closed doors away from the strife of tongues, to these newer ideals? How are you to sweep the feet that are laved by the waters of the Ganges into the fierce torrent which comes down from the glaciers of a world of which she has never even heard?

I spoke of fundamental ideals: let us carry that thought further.

For the attainment of a Western ideal, say of Government, must you not be prepared to teach the Western standard of right and wrong; of social freedom; of the interdependence of the human family (with a caste system still rigidly observed);

of domestic freedom (with the Purdah an obligation, and with orthodox Hindu marriage custom what it is); of civic morality and sanitation (when certain practices of which we know have the sanction of religion as interpreted by the priesthood); of the rights of the individual (with the modern Hindu priest ruling the zenana); of the education of children—the education which is to make the boy into a Doer, believing, like the Westerner, that deeds are important in themselves, and carry (or should carry) their retribution even here, that you cannot elect to take punishment in another incarnation?

The Purdahnashin must be taught, and the child through her, the meaning of a standard, and of lapses from a standard. Hinduism does not teach that, in these latter days.

If we measure at all in India we measure by consequences rather than by deviation from a right line—*if we measure at all.*

How are you to teach the Purdahnashin about that straight line?

How are you to teach her that a man is his Brothers' Keeper? How are you to teach her any sense of civic responsibility in the Western sense, when she answers you with "Why should I interfere? A man's actions are his judge. A man's present condition, or distress, or necessity, is the wage that he has earned. I can alter nothing."

She argues in this way about her own children also.

And how are you *to do without* helping her to a different outlook, when it is through her consciousness alone that her son can be taught?

My own conviction is that you can teach her these things and that in the fullness of time she will thrid them with something which she alone can give herself—some wonderful infusion into Western hurry and bustle of Eastern calm

and the consciousness of the things of the spirit.

But you must not hurry her. The greatest ideal which has ever held the world came from the East: and to It, inspired by the West (is that not the reward of the newer world?), the East will return. Give her time: and let us not be discouraged if the work immediately to our hand seems to be trivial and elementary.

Speaking from the experience of nearly 25 years of orthodox Hinduism in the zenanas of India, I know two things—

First, that for many years the work must be elementary and gradual; and secondly and lastly and as a constant truth, that the Reformer cannot enter upon his kingdom—upon a kingdom which he will be able to keep and to hold—except through the door of the zenana.

Back then to the woman—the orthodox Hindu Purdahnashin—along all the ways of culture and civilization and sanity

even as the great Eastern Lawyer h[a]d indicated, for when the women of a hou[s]e are led out of bondage, the Gods Progress are indeed well pleased, an[d] alone have honour among the sons of mer

PART II.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

(1) Those alone who are convinced that there is something to learn about Purdahnashins and something to learn from Purdahnashins are invited to read the second half of this slight monograph.

We shall now presume that we are a band of women anxious to help to bridge the gap which lies between those who have the habit of going about the world without restraint and those who for generations have lived their lives under conditions which make such un-restraint a sin.

How shall we put ourselves into the exact place where they stand?

To begin with we must realize the reason of that restraint.

The earliest Hinduism does not enjoin seclusion, or early marriage, or any of the

strapping and binding of Indian woma- hood with which we are familiar. As all of us know who take the trouble to stu- Indian history, Indian women took the- part in the counsels of their country of their households: Indian women w- educated in the language and literat- of their nationality, and their learni- and counsel were not despised. A bar himself is said to have consulted the political diary of an early woman rul- Bhopal. Rajput women have led their armies in the field, and have claimed the right to bear all burdens equally with their men-folk.

The change which we find in mode- times must have come gradually, and is attributable to more causes than on- But two salient causes are here set dow-

(*i*) Hinduism had begun to be overla- with priest-made law; and Hindu socie- had become degenerate. Women lost the reverence which Sanskrit literature tells us the knights of old invariably show- to their ladies in Asia as in Europe; and

order to protect his daughter a man had keep her in strict seclusion. Later he s compelled to further defence: he s compelled, or he believed himself mpelled, to arrange that she should be der her husband's roof before she tained womanhood.

Then came the priestly sanction making ividual cases a rule, and avoidance of rule a sin. And we have the Hindu of marriage as the orthodox now serve it. No child need be married fore she is three years old; but marriage fore the ninth year brings blessing on her rents in inverse ratio to the youth of the ld, and marriage after puberty is a sin.

(*ii*) The Mahomedan occupation of rthern India must have had its influce on the question of seclusion; and me say that one reason of the general clusion of Hindu women was in part e imitation of this custom, and in part e need for protection against a nation ich in those days raided all a man's ssessions, whether jewels or women.

(2) But however it began, or what ever influenced it, the custom has grown and become in its way a mark of gentility. And to-day my orthodox Hindu friends tell me that to walk abroad with face unveiled implies loss of character in their estimation, among the women belonging to races which have, at any time, practised the custom of seclusion, *i.e.*, any Hindus and Mahomedans of good family. They do not judge Europeans and Parsis by this rule, nor indeed now do they judge by this rule those Hindus and Mahomedans who have become Christians. Theirs is the broad-mindedness of those bound by the narrowest of restrictions. "What is right action for a Hindu or a Mahomedan I know: how should I know what is right action for a Christian or a Parsi?" is what they have said to me. So then we come to our first bit of knowledge. *To the orthodox Hindu woman, temptations to break through Purdah* mean temptations to become a woman of the streets.

If I emphasize this, it is only because I have heard the best-intentioned women say airily of the Purdah, "Rubbish, we must change all that." And some have even suggested trapping women into situations where they would see the forbidden, because they would be sure to like it when bounds were once broken.

But when you have grasped the Hindu woman's thought about these things, such rough and ready "Progress" is impossible: you realize that her *thought* has first to be educated, her mind first to be enlightened, before any breach of custom can be salutary. The woman now thinks of herself only as a child-bearer. She must realize that a woman has also other uses and functions in the world. She needs to forget herself as being of a different sex from a man, before she is thrust out into a world of men and women. And nothing but education can do this.

Education first then, within the restrictions of the Purdah, and open doors later

on, should be the ideal which we hold in our hearts.

And side by side with this we must bear in mind that the Hindu man's attitude towards the woman has also to be changed before we can, with comfort and safety, break down all barriers. Until a man realizes that it is possible for Indian men and women to meet, socially, intellectually, as comrades in work for the world, and in the work of the world, he is not worthy of the privilege of meeting women without restraint.

But although I have been forced to realize that the breaking down of the Purdah can be only a very slow and gradual process, I am not saying that there is no work to be done for Purdah-nashins. There is good and useful work to be done, and plenty of it . . . . and I hope to indicate later, the directions that such work might take.

(3) But first, since the outlook is so different from the Western outlook, any

candidate for work among Purdahnashins will, it will be recognized, need herself some special education.

What should this education be?

I would advise a steeping of one's self in the Eastern atmosphere of thought. There are translations of Indian sacred books to be had in every good library. I would advise the study of these. The Mahabharata, the Ramayana, excerpts from the Puranas, and the Gita. The Hindu woman reads these books in the vernacular, and dwells upon them: to understand her mind and the way she looks at life, the woman desirous of work in the zenana should read these too.

Then she should also read what students of Indian religions have written about Hinduism *as it now is*. The old books give her the ideals: the descriptions of modern writers give her what acquaintance with the zenana will give her later—*the practice* of Hinduism.*

* I would like to add a list of books but (1) it may be more educative to leave that to individual

Every act of a woman's day is ruled by religion. It is absolutely impossible to understand her in any phase of life without knowledge of this: and every milestone on the journey of herself or her children is a *religious* milestone: she knows no other division of the days, and months, and years, as they pass by.

So the student of the zenana must learn from books as far as she can about such things, about ceremonies—birth-ceremonies, child ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, death ceremonies, about widowhood and fastings and expiations, about what will outcaste, about what

---

enquiry, (2) such knowledge as I have, has come largely from the zenana and Raj-Estate practice of orthodox Hinduism. I am not an authority on modern books. Farquhar's *Crown of Hinduism* seems to me among the best of those I have seen. Sister Nivedita (Miss Noble), though a charming re-teller of old tales from the Sacred Books, is unreliable about the zenana and the practice of Hinduism among the orthodox. She is an exponent of American Hinduism and of the habits of the English-educated disciples of Swami Vivekananda, and the Hindu theists who at one time sympathized with them.

brings luck and ill-luck, about what to encourage, and what to hope sometime to discourage . . . Most of these things, unfortunately, cannot be learnt from books; but books give one a background of knowledge which will help us to appreciate what we learn "in the flesh," so to speak, later on; and meanwhile something can also be learnt from conversation with those who have been into zenanas.

To know what is to be learnt is after all the beginning of wisdom.

Then, apart from this scholastic knowledge of vernacular conditions, one wants to have a tongue that will speak the language of the Purdahnashin. *The knowledge of a vernacular is absolutely indispensable.* "Kitchen" Hindustani will not do.

One should know Bengali for the Bengalis and for Bengali Mahomedans, Hindi for Biharis, Ooriya for Orissa, Urdu for Mahomedans generally.

While in practice one finds that one needs dialect language also. But the women will teach one that; the correct language is sufficient to start with.

It seems absurd to emphasize this fact. But English women are misled by their intercourse with the charming Indian ladies belonging to the Brahmo or Progressive Indian Communities whom they meet in Society, and who have, as a rule, not themselves been in Purdah, into imagining that Purdahnashins talk English and that the ladies to be met in zenanas are of this degree of Western culture; and they do not, therefore, realize the necessity of a vernacular for zenana visiting.

Indeed the vernacular is not even, I believe, made a necessity for doctors in the Indian Women's Medical Service; and I have been astounded at the directions which I myself have sometimes heard, given by women who, medically, would scorn to have any but the highest qualifications for their work.

And not only by the ignorance of language have I been astounded, but by an ignorance of custom which has gone far to deter the advance of medical work amongst the women most in need of the help of women doctors.

To conclude then, we want a knowledge of *Hindu thought, of Hindu religion and custom, and of the vernacular,* before we are qualified for work in, or intercourse with, orthodox Hindu zenanas.

(4) Now then we will suppose that our candidate for zenana work has done all that she can in regard to her education as suggested above, how is she to get to know zenana ladies?

There are certain broad rules to remember.

The Indian lady has her etiquette as the West has its etiquette. There is no system of calling or of meeting purely for social purposes in orthodox Hinduism. Orthodox Hindus, when related, do go to each other's houses for religious ceremonies; but, barring this, they never

leave their homes except to go on pilgrimage. On the rare occasions when they visit each other, invitations must be given *in person*, and there are special local or caste rules about the forms of invitation to certain ceremonies, *e.g.*, when inviting a friend to a wedding you take a three-cornered packet of betel-nut with you. This may or may not be followed by a written invitation. The important thing is the invitation *in person;* and no one with whom you were not acquainted would be invited. Again, orthodox Hindu ladies who follow the custom of the Purdah may not as a rule be invited to meet those who are out of Purdah. This will be obvious from what has gone before, and does not need elaboration. Generally speaking, if one is in doubt as to what to do in any particular case, it is a good rule to use at least the etiquette to which one is accustomed in one's own society.

Thus, one would not send an invitation to a lady whose acquaintance one had not first taken the trouble to make.

And again, one would avoid the semblance of a command or of patronage where one was placed in a position of superiority. Indian politeness of the old type prevents the self-protection on which Westerners rely in their greater freedom of intercourse. And the feudal habit of mind induces presumptions which would astound the well-meaning.

The strictly orthodox may not go to a house where there are men-folk and men-servants; and, as I have pointed out above, they have not the habit of visiting generally, even among themselves. It would be much appreciated if English ladies showed in their intercourse with Purdahnashins that they understood these broad simple rules.

If then the orthodox Hindu Purdahnashin cannot come to us, is it possible for us to go to her?

This is possible, and she always makes a charming hostess, having a grace and courtesy of hospitality all her own. But I would suggest that she should first be

approached through some one who knows her. An orthodox Hindu may not receive casual callers, even casual women callers. You may not drive up to her door unannounced; and the hours allotted to calling among English women are particularly inconvenient. The Hindu woman is usually then either cooking or eating her food. If she has men-folk, their leave should first be asked and an appointment made.

If there is a zenana officer of Government in the district, the visit is best arranged through her.

And having got access to the zenana, the next thing for the visitor to realize is what she should avoid in conversation, etc.

If the Purdahnashin has a husband, she should not be asked to say his name; nor indeed should he ever be discussed with her. And it is not proper to require the husband's presence in the zenana during the visit. An orthodox Hindu woman may not be in the same room as her husband in the presence of strangers, and certainly may not sit or talk or unveil her

face in his presence. Interest may always be taken in the children, though it is best not to mention the children of the house, unless you know that they exist. The poor lady may be childless, and may be eating her heart out because of this: if you see only girls, do not ask questions about sons. And it is wise not to admire or praise the children too openly. The Gods must not be made jealous.

"How do you spend your day?" is a safe question, and talk of travel, or of a garden, or of the conditions of life in Europe. And anything that the visitor cares to tell of her own children and relations is received with very real interest.

If the visitor knows the vernacular, she needs to be particularly careful as to what she says, since she will be understood. The mistakes made by some in the past have often been mercifully protected by their absence of language. I have known one lady say cheerfully to an orthodox Hindu widow from whom she had extracted the pathetic fact that

childless, "Oh! But you will marry again, and there will be many fine sons."

It is best to keep to the room in which one is received. There are rooms in a Hindu household to cross the threshold of which would greatly inconvenience the family; and might involve purification. I mention this because women have been known to say with the kindest intentions in the world, "I must see all over this adorable house"; and proceed to do so.

Also, I would suggest that no eater of beef should offer to touch the orthodox Hindu woman in the Western manner of greeting especially if she is wrapped in her shawl of worship. The Bengali greeting, folded hands upraised, is beautiful in itself, and would be appreciated. I would leave the Hindu woman to take the initiative as to a hand-shake.

I would not have it imagined that intercourse between English women and orthodox Hindu Purdahnashins is to be discouraged. If English ladies will take

the trouble (as I know they have it in their kind hearts to take the trouble) to learn what is suggested and to avoid little mistakes of the kind I have indicated, I believe that a great deal of good will result from this knowledge of individuals, and that the way can be paved for the most far-reaching results of good and benefit to both.

When her house has been entered in the right way by the right kind of person, a genuine friendship springs up between the Purdahnashin and her English visitor. To begin with, the visit is a very real interest, and an opening of a safe door upon the larger world. Soon there will be an opportunity for the visitor to ask about the Purdahnashin's education. She may even teach her some little bit of embroidery or learn the like from her. Talk of books may follow, and the visitor may be able to help her Indian friend to learn to read and write her vernacular. That would be the beginning of all kinds of talk about customs, folk-tales, etc.

But the visitor would probably discover for herself that she should not go too fast. The Indian lady has her reserves, and her customs are, as I have said, her religion.

Then there will come a day when the visitor gets opportunity for talk of fresh air, or for help in illness, or in the care of the children . . . . .

Are these not *big* things, and worth a world of trouble in the education of one's self, or in restraint as to the sudden opening of shut doors?

(5) When a woman gets into an orthodox Hindu zenana as an educational officer, I think she needs all the self-education suggested above for any visitor; and I think that there should be a special syllabus for orthodox Hindus—built round the facts of her life. Such a syllabus is quoted in the Appendix as the kind of thing that is meant, more than as a hard-and-fast rule to be followed.

Group teaching should be avoided—for the reason that orthodox Hindu Purdahnashins do not like to collect at

each other's houses, and are not permitted by custom to do so. The only exception is where relations living under the joint family system consent to gather in a family abode.

And, whatever the curriculum, all caste and religious prejudices should be respected. Few people realize that there are some orthodox Hindus who object to learning to write though they will learn to read . . . . and many such local difficulties will be found by those who keep their minds and hearts open for the service of every need.

(6) It may be asked, are we never to look forward to a time when Purdahnashins will meet together, and when all Purdah barriers will be down ?

I think that these are distinctly ends and ideals to be held in our hearts, but that they will be realized the quicker for the strict observance of the present rules which bind our Hindu friends of the zenana.

Love and confidence, as I have before said, may level the most obstinate obstacles to progress. And I am full of hope for the foundation of some sort of Purdahnashin Institute situated in a Purdahnashin Park, where we can tempt our friends to meet together to take the air and learn some of the beautiful results which follow upon the interdependence of the human family. "The interdependence of the human family"—is that not what we need to grasp in every direction of life in India? Would not that fact, when mastered, help to break down the barriers of caste? of race? of religion?

As for the abolition of the Purdah system, I do not expect to see it in my lifetime, and I doubt whether it would be generally desirable, except after we have educated at least two generations of women behind the Purdah. Yet surely we can remove the worst evils of the system without throwing wide the doors. We can arrange for Purdahnashin gardens

where the women grow their own Puja flowers and their own vegetables: (we forget in these days that all the famous early Indian gardens of history were made for women). We can, as I have said, teach them about the uses of fresh air and even of exercise—they have their roof-tops and often they have large compounds enclosed with high walls, which they never enter: and we can do much else for which the life of seclusion would be a help rather than a hindrance.

One caution I would like to emphasize: it is this. I would ask that the women's prejudices should be respected in what we suggest to themselves, as also in the entertainments or reproductions of English forms of entertainment, which we attend in the outside world, among the emancipated Indian community.

Dancing is not appreciated by the orthodox Hindu Purdahnashin. The nautch-girl is of the type of woman whom she may not know. It is accounted a great proof of an understanding heart

when English ladies avoid going to nautches or having nautches at their houses. We do not know the story which the nautch-girl tells with her dancing, but the Indian men who look on know it, and the women behind the Purdah know its nature; and so for us it should be taboo, however uninteresting and harmless it may seem to us.

And, for the same reason, we should not encourage English dancing for Indian ladies—in India at any rate. It is not understood. And in the drills taught at schools there should be as little as possible of an approach to dancing.

No one who does not go in and out of the orthodox Hindu zenanas remote from towns, can have any conception of the harm done by innovations which in themselves are innocent. Garbled reports of the Western habits adopted by ladies of the Progressive communities reach the zenana and set back the clock behind the closed doors.

So I make my plea for this simple abstention.

We would all agree that the rule of the spiritual life is that the higher serves the lower, that the more educated respects the susceptibilities and prejudices of the less educated. And this is why I appeal to the enlightened, rather than suggest that the enlightened should attempt to explain the harmlessness of any such indulgence to the women behind the Purdah. And I ask it particularly in the interest of the emancipated. Everything unusual that is done by those who do not observe Purdah must necessarily look abnormal to these secluded women. And English women need to grasp this fact if they wish to stand in the gap between the emancipated and the secluded, holding out a hand of help to each.

(7) Finally, there is I think one more way in which English opinion can help.

It is in regard to demanding expert knowledge on the subject of Indian

women, and in particular of Purdahnashins. Hitherto there has been no cult of the Purdah—no demand that a person who speaks shall speak with authority. In arrangements made, for instance, in every department of Government, special knowledge is required. Where English officials are to meet Indian noblemen, an officer having special knowledge of precedence, Indian etiquette, etc., controls arrangements. No such precautions are taken in regard to women; and, if we consider, it is here that the greater precautions are required. I feel sure that this is one reason why we make such slow progress in our attempts to get Purdahnashins to break through old custom sufficiently to come together even under strictly Purdahnashin conditions, whether to meet the wives of the heads of the Province, or for educational or other purposes. Some women having knowledge, not only about their place in life, but also of their customs, should have charge of these arrangements.

As an instance of the light-hearted way in which instruction about zenana, or Indian matters generally, is given, and the absence of a public demand for some right to speak, I would quote the following experience.

An American lady was travelling in India with a party of students from the West, as their Lecturer on Indian Towns, Manners, Customs, etc.

She told me that the students were allowed to question her at the end of the lectures. To my "how alarming!" she replied: "Not at all: you see I spent a cold weather in India three years ago." And then added: "But there was one question about the answer to which I was not quite sure—'When does a Rajah become a Nawab?'"

Some knowledge of orthodox Indian custom and language should surely be requisitioned in forming committees whether for educational or social work among Indian ladies. At present such knowledge is never at all taken into consideration;

and the philanthropists, and those desirous of the service of big needs, miss their chance of really successful effort, and are often associated with really bad mistakes. A demand of this nature would be an inducement to English women to qualify themselves in the ways indicated, and would be a great help in the realization of that " better understanding " which is after all the only foundation of true fellowship.

PART III.

APPENDIX.

In this part of my note I propose to set down—

A. A few suggestions and remarks relating to nurses and doctors and medical matters generally.

B. A note on the education of Purdah-nashins.

But, as with this entire monograph, I would like to say that I have not attempted in any particular to exhaust my subject. All I propose is to indicate the lines on which women may apply themselves to study, and self-education, and the kind of things which they should *at least* try to avoid or to secure in their intercourse with the orthodox Hindu woman of the zenana.

A. Orthodox Hindu custom considered in relation to the training of Hindu women as nurses and doctors, and to the admission of caste Purdahnashins to hospital.

I.—Nurses.

(1) The nurse should be some one with whom there is community of " water and conduct " (*Jalacharan*), *i.e.*, some one who can offer water to the highest castes—Brahmins and Kshatriyas.

Adopting this rule we find that, in addition to Brahmin and Kshatriya women, women belonging to the following castes are admissible and desirable candidates.

They are listed in order of their standing in the scale of caste relationship :—

Baidya ..	.. The doctor caste—has the sacred thread.
Kayastha	.. The writer caste.
Goala ..	.. The milkman caste.
Kamar or Lohar	.. Blacksmiths.
Kumar ..	.. Potters.
Sadgope..	.. Agriculturists.
Napit ..	.. The barber caste.
Gandhabarnik	.. Dealers in spices.
Tanti ,,	.. Weavers.

Kahar	..	.. Carriers.
Tili	..	.. Grain merchants.

Women of all the above castes may offer water to Brahmins, and are not outcasted by doing them "sick service." It is from these castes that the women are drawn who now, untrained, wait in zenanas upon the women and children of the highest caste; and even Brahmin women will do the most *menial of services* for their relations.

(2) Again, there is nothing to prevent even Brahmin women from training, *e.g.*, as midwives. But objection might be taken by some to the publicity and advertisement incidental to any training given at public colleges and hospitals. Women will do in zenanas what they would not like to be advertised as doing.

As a concession to this feeling, it might be stated in advertisements of Hospital Training-Schools that women who objected to the doing of any menial duty believed to outcaste them would naturally be excused such menial duty.

(3) Candidates would want to be assured that their food arrangements would be protected against breach of caste.

(*i*) It is advisable that there should be separate kitchens for all Hindus, remote from the kitchens used by Christians and Mahomedans, and that there should be a separate tap (water) and a separate place where Hindu cooking vessels can be cleaned.

(*ii*) No non-Hindu should enter these kitchens or let his shadow fall on the food and water reserved for caste Hindus.

(*iii*) Thakurs, *i.e.*, Brahmin cooks, should be employed. No one but a Brahmin can cook or touch the rice offered to Brahmins, or eaten by those who have *jalacharan* with Brahmins.

(*iv*) Widows, if so desiring, should be allowed to cook their own food. There should be a group of private fireplaces in one kitchen where widows of the same caste may cook. Each widow has to cook at her own fireplace.

Two private kitchens are suggested: one for Brahmin and Kshatriya widows, one for widows of other castes.

(4) Parents and guardians of candidates for a Nurse's training will wish to know that the Purdah of women candidates will be respected. It is most desirable that this should be done, as the stories current in zenanas about the ways and morals of women trained as nurses are chief among the causes deterring other candidates.

(5) It is suggested that there should be a room set apart as a *Puja Ghar* for orthodox Hindu nurses and convalescent patients, to be served by themselves, not by priests. This would greatly help to allay suspicion as to breach of religious necessity or custom.

(6) In accepting candidates for training, great care would have to be taken that the college or training school has legal authority to admit them. The written consent of parents or guardians should be taken, and some sort of

agreement entered into. It is recommended that forms of consent and of agreement to training and service, should be drawn up as a preliminary to the search for candidates. A woman is " in the custody of her father as a child ; of her husband when married ; of her parents-in-law or of her son when a widow." There should really be a legal adviser attached to training schools and hospitals, to consider every single candidate admitted to training. A scandal in this respect would do much to damage colleges and hospitals generally.

The authorities should also be prepared with a list of the duties which they can excuse in response to caste objection, and the list of duties and studies that qualification involves.

(7) As the joint Hindu family system is breaking up, Hindu widows are becoming an increasing burden and problem in the houses of the orthodox. Special effort might be made to attract these women by leaflets written in the vernacular and

addressed to the orthodox—urging upon them their own beautiful rule that only the highest may serve the lowest, and the religious obligation of service attaching to Hindu widowhood.

They might also be reminded that though care will certainly be taken to protect caste prejudices, if this life of the service of the sick is looked upon as a religious duty, there is nothing that can, in its execution, hurt or outcaste.

II.—Doctors.

There is nothing in Hinduism to prevent the highest caste Hindu from being educated as a doctor and doing every duty —including operations, the touching of a dead body, etc.—incidental to this profession.

In regard to English women trained for the Indian Medical Service, or for work in Indian hospitals and zenanas, it is urged that a knowledge of the vernacular and of the customs of the country should be made obligatory.

III.—The Protection of the Caste of Orthodox Hindu Patients.

(1) Provision should be made for the protection of caste in hospitals intended for orthodox Hindu Purdahnashins.

(*i*) Water and liquid medicines should be administered by those nurses only who are Brahmins and Kshatriyas, or of the castes listed in this note I (1) above. And cooked food (rice) by Brahmans or those of the same caste as the patient.

(*ii*) No non-caste person, doctor, or nurse, should stand within the threshold of the patient's room when a liquid is being administered.

(*iii*) No non-caste person should touch the water or rice taken by the caste patient or should enter her kitchen or her room while she is taking her food. Kitchens for Hindus should be distinct and remote from Mahomedan and Christian kitchens and from non-caste Hindu kitchens.

The matron controlling the food of the establishment should know what food is

admissible for caste people, *e.g.*, apart from the eating of meat, the eating of onions is forbidden to some orthodox Hindus.

She should also be told that when there is a death in a ward all the cooked food intended for orthodox Hindus must be thrown away, and that the orthodox Hindu is compelled to fast till the dead body is removed.

(2) Provision should be made for the protection of Purdah.

The arrangements usually made in Dufferin Hospitals are not complete.

There should be an absolutely secluded entrance and exit for Purdahnashins to the Hospital.

The Out-patients' department should have a room where Purdahnashin women can sit apart from the non-Purdah. It is not generally known that strict Purdahnashins need protection from non-Purdahnashin women of low caste also.

Orthodox Hindu visitors to a new mother may not touch her or the baby

for 21 days in the case of a boy, for 30 days in the case of a girl baby. And no nurse touching the baby or mother should touch the orthodox Hindu visitor.

All the clothes used by the baby and mother, the bedding, bed-clothes, etc., during this period, are unclean. No washing can restore them to purity.

The poverty of the strictly orthodox of good caste does not absolve them from observance of this rule: and a knowledge of custom in this direction would be greatly appreciated, and might induce many who now die or suffer agonies in their own homes, to go into Dufferin and Zenana Hospitals when their hour is upon them.

On visiting days in Purdahnashin wards, Purdahnashins should be protected from the men visiting other Purdahnashin patients. A woman may be too poor to afford a Purdahnashin cottage or private ward and yet be of the strictest Purdahnashin habit.

It is suggested that there should be more than one Purdahnashin ward, and that the strictest castes should be put as far as possible together. For Purdahnashins of good family, the cottage—separate cottages for Hindus and Mahomedans with kitchens attached and provision for the residence of a relation—has been found the best arrangement. Where space allows it is best to build round a central courtyard however small, back to the world. Cottages should never be used interchangeably for Hindus and Mahomedans.

(3) Care is needed in relation to the death of orthodox Hindus.

Orthodox Hindus should die on the earth, not in a bed.

An unfloored room into which the dying could, where the illness permits, be lifted would be a great addition to any caste hospital.

Its very existence would serve to allay prejudice.

If a few pots of the Tulsi (Basil) plant could be kept in the hospital garden, so that the Tulsi might be placed beside the bed of a dying patient, this attention would be much appreciated.

No one but a caste Hindu or those of the caste listed in this note I (1) should touch the dead body of a caste Hindu. The women imagine that sweepers and outcastes will touch their bodies in hospital; and this, to the superstitious, affects rebirth.

It is suggested that the leaflets proposed in this note I (6) should contain assurance on this point.

APPENDIX.

B. A Note on the Education of Orthodox Purdahnashins.

The first step in the education of Purdahnashin women and girls is to inspire a desire to be taught; the next, to give them confidence, to make them realize that education need not outcaste them, or outrage Hindu custom.

It seems to me that a beginning might be made in villages by weekly talks to women in the village schoolroom. In towns by collecting women of the better classes, where possible in the house, say, of the Head of a Girls' School or of the Inspectress of Schools, or of any person in the neighbourhood who has succeeded in getting the confidence of the women.

In strictly orthodox zenanas the difficulty will be to get the women together at all. But it has been done; and what has once happened may happen again. *It is the personal element which counts.*

My own idea is that from the right nucleus one could work outward in all directions.

I would bring the women together in some beautiful Central Park and Institute —such as Warren Hastings' Country House in Calcutta, the place known as Hastings' House which Lord Curzon acquired for the Government. I would make the grounds absolutely "Purdah," planting out (graded foliage) the road: I would make the approach so "Purdah" that the women would be secure from the observation of even their own chauffeurs, or coachmen, or palki-bearers.

Once inside the grounds, I should encourage an atmosphere of absolute freedom. At present many women get no fresh air at all: to be in the open air and to see things growing would, in itself, be the beginning of education, and would satisfy the blind groping of many a poor little Purdahnashin after some contact with life.

Then there would be games with the children, whom the women would of course bring with them : and, in course of time, there would be entertainment for the women also.

They would gather in the Institute for short ten-minute talks in the vernacular —talks about mothercraft, about domestic sanitation, about what was doing in the world in all directions.

The talks would grow longer, gradually; and gradually too the women would find courage to ask questions.

Sometimes the talks would be illustrated by magic lantern slides.

By the end of the session, Purdahnashins and helpers at the Institute would be friends: and then would come the most interesting part of the relationship—individual talks, leading to the discovery of the need of each little lady after her kind.

Perhaps the Purdahnashin would ask to be taught to read and write. To begin

with, all teaching would need to be individual, from house to house. Group teaching is not possible, because the women, as I have said earlier in these pages, are not in the habit of visiting each other. But the Institute, if successful in itself with the women, and if trusted by the men (in the ways of protection of caste and the Purdah), might grow into a kind of Purdahnashin School, combining mothercraft with the rudiments of an ordinary education.

To remove illiteracy, to prepare the women for a home life, to help them to a wider outlook—these would appear to be the most suitable ends for which to work.

Great care would need to be taken about the teachers sent into zenanas. It seems to me that for zenana work you need women of the very highest culture and training and self-discipline: for only these would truly understand a civilization not their own; and only these, in that patience with ignorance which is the test

of knowledge, would go slowly enough to help.

As to what should actually be taught —one can give only the barest outline.

Experience indicates—

Reading and Writing if the women wish this; and in the vernacular, to begin with at any rate, care being taken to respect local prejudice of whatever nature.

Ciphering.—Enough to understand the daily bazaar accounts, or the zemindari accounts which widow proprietors might have to oversee.

Hygiene, etc.—Personal hygiene with special reference to motherhood.

Domestic sanitation generally.

Care of the home: clothes—suggestions about textiles; about the washing of clothes, etc. Talks about the responsibilities arising out of the relationships of a home, mother and daughter, mother and son, husband and wife, mistress and servant.

Child Culture.—Physical, mental, spiritual; laws of health, and treatment of simple ailments.

Food, etc.—Food values; preparation of food; need of regularity and moderation.

Simple talks about the care of the cow, buffalo, or goat, in relation to a good milk supply.

The making of gardens; the growing of vegetables, and of flowers used in *Puja*.

Geography and History.—Travel talks and history talks. Talks of the world's work, with a view to helping to ambition and to interest in the careers of husband and son.

Sewing.—The cutting out and making of garments; the use of ancient embroideries, etc., in clothes and house decoration.

Music, Drawing, Weaving, Modelling, etc., taught as special subjects, regard being had to any particular occupation or industry belonging to the district.

As general hints one would add—

Discourage imitation of the West as far as possible in the orthodox Hindu home in dress or otherwise.

Encourage the revival of old designs or embroideries, jewellery, furniture or else.

Special pains should be taken to revive stitches used in old Oriental embroideries.

In some parts of India every woman of olden times told the story, which she would wish to be her own romance, into some single piece of beautiful embroidery. The remnants of these pieces of work, which are to be found in the shops of curio-dealers, show what we have lost by the disuse of this custom.

* * * * * * * *

Finally, to her who has been wise comes the great opportunity—the opportunity of helping the women, past superstition or degrading custom in those directions in which they themselves acknowledge such custom or superstition

to be an encrustation on original Hinduism; the opportunity to strengthen and develop the women's own best spiritual impulses, and to bring these into relation to their daily life; the opportunity to develop in them a sense of individuality, and of moral responsibility.

May we be sufficient for this Service of Love!

Some of the suggestions made in the last part of this Note were originally put together for a consideration of the subject of Orthodox Hindu Education by Members of the Association of University Women in India.

00050853

Digitized with financial assistance from

HT Parekh FOUNDATION

An Initiative by HDFC WITH YOU, RIGHT THROUGH

on 15 October, 2018